To: Mr. Frank Fellone, Deputy Editor, Arkansas-Democrat Gazette,

Reid column wildly inaccurate and misleading

It is unfortunate the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project continues to be so misunderstood, as evidenced by Trey Reid's error filled column Sunday, Dec. 7. We invite your readers to consider the facts below so they may decide for themselves. Reports and studies are posted for review at www.mvm.usace.army.mil/grandprairie and www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.

Reid's column, in addition to containing complete misstatements of fact, turns one technical paper on its head to reach the opposite conclusion of the report, and is filled with inflammatory language that clouds true discussion and debate of the project.

The fact is we do have a choice. We can either protect the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers and thereby protect the economy and environment of the region and state or allow them to be depleted with terrible economic and environmental consequences as the vital industries and ecosystem functions they provide are lost. All project studies for the past 50 years reached the same conclusion -- the Grand Prairie Area Demonstration Project is the only viable solution to protect the Alluvial and Sparta aquifers.

The fact is the White River *is* an ecological treasure without equal, as are its wetlands and the entire Grand Prairie region. The GPADP will protect water levels in the White River to ensure water quality for fish, wildlife and navigation as well as aquifer recharge over time. As for waterfowl, irrigation season is not waterfowl season and no pumping is scheduled for December. The project will also provide many additional acres of flooded rice fields for waterfowl on the Grand Prairie. Without water there will be no rice; without flooded rice fields there will be no ducks.

The fact is the GPADP represents an unprecedented federal, state and local investment level of $35 million for conservation efficiencies and water storage capabilities (on-farm measures) including the farmers' share of more than $12 million. Additional funds were turned back and not used to build more storage because it would have been a waste of taxpayer and farmer money to build storage facilities that could not be used without the ability to import excess water from the White River. The Grand Prairie project is an integrated project, combining surface water

distribution and on-farm storage and conservation practices. There is not enough rainfall on an average annual basis to fill the reservoirs and support on-farm practices without an effective delivery system.

The fact is the “new report” cited in Reid’s column is a technical paper presented at the United States Committee on Irrigation and Drainage conference last May in Phoenix, Ariz. The paper, authored by engineers from USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and Agricultural Research Service, compared systems that pump only ground water with the proposed post-project conditions, with extensive reservoirs and tailwater recovery pits. The paper defined the proposed post-project conditions as on-farm conservation measures and storage facilities *without* ground water pumping restrictions and *without* the import of excess water from the White River. The paper compared the Grand Prairie irrigation of today – pumping, rainwater, and on-farm conservation measures – with irrigation using only pumping and rainwater without the recycling and efficiencies. The paper did not study what would happen once the excess water from the White River was imported to the region. Its conclusion: conservation is not enough.

The fact is the import level of excess water from the White River was determined after extensive review as having no significant impacts to water quality, fish and wildlife, or navigation. Discussions of such importance to the future of the region’s economy and ecosystems must be based on sound science not misrepresentations of facts, fear-mongering, and the careless use of terms such as “needless degradation,” “destruction,” and “assault.”

The fact is no other viable choices have been identified to protect the aquifers, sustain irrigated agriculture, and create more waterfowl habitat on the Grand Prairie without harming the White River. The GPADP studies all indicate on-farm conservation practices alone will not reduce ground water pumping from the aquifer to sustainable levels. It is the combined power of on-farm storage and conservation, and the import of excess water from the White River that will ensure both the Sparta and Alluvial aquifers are protected and irrigated agriculture is sustained for the future. All studies indicate completion of the full scope of the project will have no significant impacts on the White River and its wetlands, and will have significant positive benefits for waterfowl on the Grand Prairie.

The fact is without the project, irrigated agriculture on the Grand Prairie is not sustainable and the increasing irrigation costs to the farmers will be insignificant compared to the loss of farms and the decrease in the tax base in the region as farm workers and processors lose jobs and income and municipalities risk losing their drinking water source in the Sparta Aquifer. American farmers provide the food and fiber for people in this country and around the world. The devastating effects of doing nothing or doing only part of what is needed will impact many, many more than just the farmers and sportsmen of Eastern Arkansas.

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